Appendix for Sengupta and Ackerly

Brooke Ackerly

The undergraduate course discussed in Sengupta and Ackerly is a 27-meeting course taught by Brooke Ackerly at Vanderbilt University to undergraduates of all classes.

Throughout the semester students prepared for each class meeting by reading and reflecting following guidelines prepared by Professor Ackerly, “Reading Sheets”. For each class session, the Reading Sheets oriented students to the learning goals for the session. Over the semester, the sheets built on previous class meetings’ learning and guided the students toward the larger learning goals of the class. For example, in one session we would read authors who talked *about* a phenomenon or concept and in the next session we analyzed other authors’ scholarship with respect to that concept. We include in this appendix abbreviated versions of the two sheets that prepared students for the class meetings on epistemic oppression and the politics of knowledge. The first introduces the *problem* as researchers experience it and the second provides examples of scholars theorizing about the problem of epistemic injustice. These two classes were followed by the edit-a-thons.

The numbered and italicized text was from the Reading Sheet. The bullet points are individual students’ responses. Each class followed the outline of the discussion and the student contributions were used to spark the discussions. The italicized text in each bullet is Ackerly’s response or plan for how to use the points in class. The class discussions were very dynamic. By providing the plan, the students could see that even if the conversation was organic, the content was “important” and leading toward their learning goals. The plan structure enables students to bring their own ideas into the discussion, to bring others’ ideas into the class discussion, and to have further ideas stimulated during or after class. The Reading Sheet, converted to a Class Plan also gave students and outline in which to keep their notes, hopefully reducing note-taking anxiety and facilitating the participation of all students.

Class 6: Epistemology/Whose Knowledge: Research

To prepare students for the discussion of the politics of knowledge that Anasuya Sengupta will lead, in this class, the sixth in a semester of 27 class meetings, we discuss the politics of knowledge.

Readings

(Smith [1999] 2012, xi-43)

(Santos, Nunes, and Meneses 2007)

1. Discuss the readings with 2 classmates
2. Identify at least two themes from within these readings that we should discuss (e.g., identification of a key concept or key juxtaposition)

* White, heterosexual privilege in the study of feminism: We did not get into this enough in class. Let’s make sure we are attentive to this going forward…we will circle back and close with a discussion of what to do about privilege in the last 10 minutes.
* How do we attend to that privilege? Attend to epistemology – to the idea that we know “socially.” What “other” social knowledges exist that privilege some people and undermine the epistemic authority of others?

1. Questions of clarity, comprehension, etc. from the readings or last class that would enable you to get more out of class.

* What is epistemology in the scope of feminist research and these readings?
* How would Smith view non-Western imperialism and colonialism? The biggest example that comes to mind is that of Japan, but other non-Western powers such as China and India have exhibited imperialism as well. Of course, all of these countries have themselves experienced intense Western imperialism in modern history. When I was in China, they remembered Japanese imperialism as much as Western, if not more so. How can we approach this incredibly complex topic of countries that are colonizers who have also been colonized?
* The concept of both Global North and Global South, which come up in the Santos are slightly confusing. It feels very Europe- and US-centered for global north, but the majority of Africa is also in the northern hemisphere.
* When we are dealing with a piece that is written by multiple authors (in this case, the Santos et al reading) how can we acknowledge the contributions of all authors, and therefore not marginalize their voices, and yet avoid making an analysis of that work clunky with citations?

1. Questions from last class to revisit in light of today’s readings:

* When reading about how race and feminism intersect, as a black female I have admittedly favored critiques and analyses constructed by black women like Kimberle Crenshaw {, 1989 #196} and Audre Lorde {, [1984] 2007 #10838} for guidance because I consider the lived experience a sort of expertise. And yet, when discussing feminist issues of “the erotic” or “global warming” etc., I am not nearly as subconsciously invested in the author’s status, nor am I critically looking for it--and yet I should be. Would a feminist analysis of global warming, for instance, not be different and just as much a “lived experience” piece for a woman of color (who is disproportionately more affected by global warming as opposed to white women) than a white woman? And yet, why is global warming a stereotypically “white person’s” or “white women’s” issue? Likewise, up until reading the Moraga {, 1979 #10781} piece (having first read Lorde’s piece on eroticism, I assumed that Lorde was a white woman--and did not question it until reading the latter piece, at which point it made me go back and question whether I should think about the earlier piece differently or more seriously, and now I question myself--should I think about the earlier piece differently having some insight into the identity of the author behind the words? *There are so many interesting points being made here. We will want to unpack them together and also draw on the questions you are raising to ask other questions. Interestingly, our epistemic bias can make it difficult to attend to our epistemic bias even when we are TRYING to attend to our epistemic bias! What can we do in light of this possibility?*

1. What can you do from your privilege – the privilege of seeing the possibility of not seeing injustice – to take it on?

* Discuss the readings with people from class with whom you HAVEN’T discussed them yet.
* Talk about these readings and class ideas with your friends.
* Look for examples of the invisible stones being thrown and take your bystander awareness training to racism. “Invisible stones” is a reference to an idea brought up in a previous class that sometimes a person is “hit” with racism in a form that those around that person don’t notice. When might that happen in class – this class or others?
* Look at the syllabi in your classes and assess the gendered, racial, global composition of the texts.
* Write a Wikipage on someone currently invisible on Wikipedia.

Class 7: Epistemology/Whose Knowledge: Decolonizing knowledge and the internet. Guests in Class: Anasuya Sengupta of @whoseknowledge.org

Readings

(Fricker 2007, Introduction)

(Acey et al. 2018)

1. Discuss the readings with 2 classmates.
2. Identify at least two themes from within these readings that we should discuss (e.g., identification of a key concept or key juxtaposition).

* Social hierarchies are always present and always relevant to how we gather, perceive, and disseminate knowledge.
* One big theme that I got from the readings is the invisibility of epistemic injustice. Social power is so deeply ingrained in our systems of knowledge, that it is impossible to separate the two and identify their connection.

1. Identify at least one quote related to each theme; select this quote based on its meaning or its importance.

* All information is inherently biased because no source can be wholly objective. “online or networked technologies – and the ‘internet’ itself – are deeply political” (Acey et al. 2018, 3). The use of the word “political” in terms of bias has not been (that I can recall) used before by an author, though many have inferred it. I like the use of this word, it has a lot of power behind it, which conveys how potentially dangerous a “political” information source can be.
* I liked the quote from Acey et al. that “We believe how we do our work is as important (or more) than what we do” (2018, 9). To me, this could be the thesis of our whole class. I would like to know if other in the class agree with it?

1. How do today’s readings affect your understanding of last week’s readings.

* In the Santos et al (2007) reading, the authors discussed “the production of knowledge” as a “social practice” (Fuentes and Gámez, xxi). I had initially thought about this idea in how, as a student especially, learning often takes place with others. It was not until these readings however, that I began to think about this idea globally. The analyses by Acey et. al on Wikipedia helped me to understand how the way in which so many people get their knowledge is tacitly, yet incredibly biased and marginalizing towards thousands of groups of people. It also strengthened the prior reading’s claims about the opposition between the humanities and the sciences. I can now see how both are epistemological to some extent, and we must acknowledge this factor in order to be inclusive and just in any research we do regarding the two.
* Is there any way we can ethically use the master’s tools (Lorde [1984] 2007)? Or is that too much in the realm of ‘the ends justify the means?

1. Look back at your definition of what makes for a good discussion question? Draft a question of your own that you think should elicit discussion (6).

* One question I have for our guest speaker, Anasuya Sengupta, is about how she got involved in this work. Was there a personal catalyst (this might be to intimate a question) or a professional event that inspired her to use her impressive academic background to champion intersectional feminism?
* Is there any way to gather and disperse information that is truly, wholly, objective?
* How do normative assumptions affect the epistemic objectification of indigenous and marginalized peoples? When, how, and why are roles they take on assumed to be part of their “nature?” Do they preserve the status quo? Consider for example something like sexual objectification and how women are viewed as objects for male pleasure.
* “For Whose Knowledge, we consider ourselves revolutionary pragmatists – we recognize we use the master’s tools in certain contexts, as we continue to imagine and plan for transformation.” (Acey et al 2018 p. 8) What would Audre Lorde think about this approach? In The Master’s Tools article it seems that she would disapprove of the use of any patriarchal structures, but she also couldn’t have foreseen the incredibly complex tool that the internet is today. Would she approve of Whose Knowledge using the master’s tools (Wikipedia) in this way for the sake of pragmatism? If she wouldn’t have approved, does that mean that Lorde was being too idealistic?
* It is intuitive to feel angered by society’s misrepresentation of many cultures. Most of the recent readings we have discussed condemn it as a gross injustice. In particular, Indigenous groups are especially marginalized and silenced by the internet as a whole, and the ways in which history has been written not to acknowledge them. Of course, no individual or group deserves to have their histories mistold. But, can we really be sure that they wish to have them told in the first place? Could it be possible that some, if any, cultures are so different from “ours” that they do not care to be studied, documented, or even known by other cultures? If so, how is it anyone’s right to research them? Moreover, is it possible to know the wishes of Indigenous individuals without studying them? How can we work to be inclusive in our learned historical knowledge while still respecting the vastly diverse types of societies that are either misrepresented or altogether unknown? *This is a long and complicated set of questions that we should try to answer and not treat as rhetorical questions.*
* Who is included in the Global South in the context of who uses the internet? Since the internet is accessible from anywhere, it might be difficult to define in terms of internet users. For instance, are minority or diaspora groups who access the internet from Global north countries still considered to represent the global south on the internet?
* What is the global south in this context? I know it is almost impossible to come up with a good term that embodies where development should be occurring. However, it seems that when determining that “75% of the world’s online population is from the global South” location and race is what determines what is marginalized. I went to the source and got their cited number by adding the number of internet users in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, South America and Latin America. I think it is important to acknowledge that location and race is not necessarily the correct means to determine who is oppressed. There are plenty of people in Latin America, Middle East and Asia who have access to the internet and have the means to tell and have their story reflected. I think that the project is targeting the correct people. I think that they should stay away from using broad generalizations because different areas are experiencing drastically different amounts of epistemological injustice. Although, Moraga believes that one should not rank oppression I believe that in this context of the internet there are people who are significantly more oppressed than others. The native American’s history is practically deemed untrue because other their methods of transferring and sharing knowledge. There may not be as many articles on Japanese manufacturing as American manufacturing on Wikipedia, Japanese oppression or epistemological injustice does not really count as the global South in my opinion. *There is a lot to address in this run of questions and comments. How can we unpack these questions? Try to first clarify what is being asked and then to answer it, again, taking on the argument not letting the question be the argument.*
* How do we empower those who voices are not heard? Especially in today’s technologically advances society, why is it mostly white men who are providing “knowledge”, and how can we work to change that, as these authors are?
* How do we challenge the basis of epistemological marginalization? Will changing the way we do research change the way in which “epistemological stances alienate non-white, non-male, non-Western peoples and the knowledge they produce” (Fricker 2007: 5)? How do we make people aware of the way in which they acquire knowledge (Wikipedia, etc.)?

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Lorde, Audre. [1984] 2007. "The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House." In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 110-114.

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